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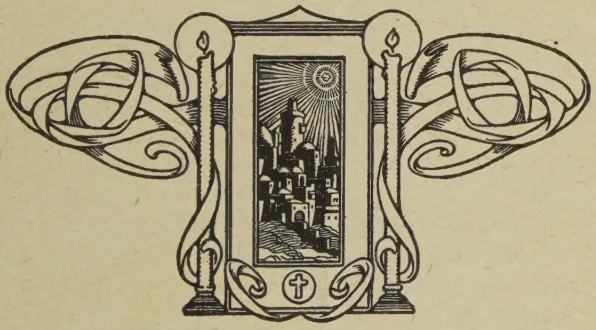

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Where Reality Dwells

The Rev. Harry R. Butman
Allin Congregational Church, Dedham, Mass.

A MINISTER, about to assume the leadership of a "high potential" Church, said to me at Oberlin, "I will have living symbols only in my new edifice—water, wheat, grapes. These things have meaning in an agricultural parish. I will not have a Cross. The Cross is a symbol of death and defeat; it has no meaning for men of today." The words were shocking; not because they were unorthodox, but because, along with their burden of error, they carried a cargo of truth. In many a liberal Church, even those with chancels, Cross-centered, the Cross is an esthetic, rather than a strictly religious, symbol. There is need to examine that ancient Christian symbol from a new approach, and what follows is an attempt to do this. This interpretation has flowered from a seed sown by Arthur Koestler, and germinated by William Addison in his excellent volume, *The English Country Parson.*

This paper will deal with man's search for religious reality, and it will presuppose that man cannot live without that reality. Our thesis is that reality is found at the intersection of time and eternity.

I shall give this trio of formidable words—time, eternity, reality—no technical philosophical treatment, not merely because of my inability to handle adequately so profound a trilogy of topics, but because of my conviction that even if I could so speak the result would be of dubious value in terms of truth for living. Some one has cynically said that the philosopher, in his search for ultimate truth, is like a man in an absolutely dark room, hunting for a perfectly black cat that isn't there. Emerson's more formal utterance on the folly of trying to grasp reality by pure reason is apposite:

> "The great Idea baffles wit,
> Language staggers under it,
> It leaves the learned in the lurch;
> Nor art, nor power, nor toil can find
> The measure of the eternal Mind,
> Nor hymn, nor prayer, nor church."

I

If we are to grasp reality at all, a goodly share of this apprehension must be intuitive. We must seize the real with our whole personalities, with our hearts as well as our minds. And we can thus clutch the real. In experience we do see and appreciate the emerald magnificence of an elm in new leaf, though we may lack the ability to write of it in precise botanical terms. Spiritual reality, when experienced, has at least three marks: it makes a man know that life is purposive; it gives him a sense of durable satisfaction; and it powerfully impresses him with a sense of its changelessness.

From their reading, and from their pastoral experience, most ministers know that a disturbingly large number of people are haunted and depressed by a sense of the unreality of life. Life to them is pointless, unsatisfying, fluctuating; it lacks a continuing glow. This is seldom said bluntly, but it is spoken eloquently and often in unfinished sentences of longing; it is reflected in the hopeless cast of men's faces; it shows itself in the sterile routines of tawdry fun and unworthy stimulations by which they try to escape the unreality that grips them. The swarms of people who pay their money at the movies to see the flossy trivia which comprise a full ninety per cent of the producers' output, bear mighty witness to a boredom and dissatisfaction with life so

deep and terrible that even Hollywood's rhinestone, juvenile day-dreams are desirable by contrast. Nor must it be supposed that soul sickness spawned by unreality is exclusively the lot of little, incompetent people. To the contrary, the same malaise destroys men of power and fame. Ross Lockridge, Jr., author of the strangely stirring *Raintree County,* committed suicide shortly after wordly success came to him in full spate. The fame he strove for in poverty and toil, when attained, was not real. It gave him no sense of meaning in life; it afforded him no persistent pleasure, it was a transient thing.

"The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes, or it prospers. And anon,
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face,
Lighting a little hour or two, is gone."

And a prose footnote to Omar's poetry is to be found in the career of Charles Gray, hero of John P. Marquand's latest best seller, *Point of No Return.* He is but one of many who has found that even successful labor in the market places of this world has as its reward a Dead Sea fruit, good to the eye while on the bough, but salt and ashes to the mouth when taken and tasted.

Now the reason for this unreality in life as it is lived by men and women small and great, obscure or famous—this meaningless, dry, unstable existence—can be rather simply said. The majority of men live their lives in time, and in time alone. By life in time I mean the life of the senses, the life which is too much concerned with this world and the things thereof. The life in time is a string of days devoted to pay, promotion, and prestige; its motivations are lust, vanity, vengeance; its creed and code is the worship of self and the service of self. It is dark with fear, lurid with the flames of guilt, glittering with the harsh lights of empty pleasure: no soft and steady radiance from another world illuminates it. It is a life which stretches endlessly and monontonously before men, across aric plains of disillusionment, frustration anc soul-fatigue.

"When I meet the morning beam
Or lay me down at night to dream,
I hear my bones within me say,
Another night, another day."

In short, this sort of living is not life at all in the spiritual sense of the word It is mere persistence in time, and that is quite a different thing than eternal life Although men cling to this life, actually its infinite duration could easily be a very evil kind of hell. Aldous Huxley develops this idea in his little-publicized *Time Must Have a Stop,* a work which I commend to those interested in this theme. Life in time is essentially unreal, it has no purpose, it conveys no sense of changelessness. However far it may stretch out by the calendar, it does not lead to reality but only to more of itself.

II

I now ask you to explore with me an approach to one of the most intricate and fundamental aspects of the religious life the relationship and interplay of time and eternity.

Since theology tries to speak of eternal things with temporal tongue, it is inevitably forced to use the language of analogy. Therefore let us symbolize the life in time by a horizontal line. Eternity to continue our geometrical metaphor, we shall represent, not by a continuance of that line, but by a vertical line cutting directly across it. This vertical line of eternity, in concrete religious experience is formed by the upsurge of man's soul toward God, and the down-reach of God's love for man. These two lines, as you can clearly see, make the most significant of Christian symbols, the Cross. Now just where time and eternity intersect, where horizontal and vertical impinge upon each other, reality is to be found. This, to make a rather obvious pun, is the crux of the matter.

We have already considered the horizontal line, life in time. Let us now briefly examine the vertical line. Eternal life is of God: it differs qualitatively from life in time. Our fathers, with their insistence upon conversion and rebirth, understood this difference better than we. Both the Bible and later mystical literature abound in metaphors which describe this new, different, real life. It is not something which comes after death; it is something which deeply interfuses itself with life lived by clock and calendar; it is a leaven which leavens the whole lump of heavy life in time. Adolph Harnack's famous definition of Christianity as eternal life lived in the midst of time, clearly recognizes this element of eternity. As the angels ascended and descended Jacob's ladder, so this vertical line, in modern terms, has a two-way traffic. It is a mingling of two spiritual streams; the upthrust of man's yearning for reality, the heotropic, God-hungry surge of his soul; and the infinite compassionate love of God the Creator, flooding down towards man as the sun's rays pour warmth and life upon the grass of the field.

But since we men are sons of time, captives of the calendar, finite creatures, it is only where the line of eternity crosses concrete, three-dimensional life in time that we can find reality. Just as mere life in time, the unspiritual life, is, as Hamlet found, "weary, flat, stale and unprofitable," so the efforts of men to live a purely spiritual life are unreal and futile. There are men who forsake the daily routine, who renounce the pushes and lures of the flesh, who lay aside the angel's sin of ambition and retire to monastic cells to live the solely contemplative life. By way of brief rebuttal, it is sufficient to note that Jesus nowhere recommends this as a general practice, and he himself lived out in the middle of the rushing stream of brute event. He taught that, by acts of duty, service, love, eternal life might be lived even in the midst of time. There are those who lament our carnality; they regret our flesh; they would that we had been born as the angels, without passion or imperfection. Well, it is useless to inquire why Almighty God made us as he did: why the fabric of our souls should be so strangely woven with the warp of time and the woof of eternity must remain a part of his secret counsel. But it is so. When sea creatures are dredged up from the icy deeps into the thin and weightless atmosphere of sea level, they expand and perish. They need great pressure because of their nature. We humans, who are creatures of a spiritual abyss, may also need the pressure of our atmosphere. Lifted to some rarefied, supersensual realm, we might distort and die.

III

Yet we must not think that we are absolute exiles from heaven because of our life in time. In a very real sense the eternal can be caught in time's snares. Again and again we see this happen in art, where physical details net timeless reality. Ink from Bach's pen on paper, a queer tube of wood, a reed, breath, and much skill, and we have the piercing beauty of the oboe's chromatic crying in the *Toccata* and *Fugue* in D Minor. The white wonder of gulls rising against the cobalt blue of the morning sky above a lonely shore; the sad sweetness that dwells in the face of a sleeping child; the gay music of flowers about the door—in all these things, temporal, physical though they be, there is something timeless, something that partakes of eternity. We could multiply illustrations without end, but we sum the matter up with St. John's packed sentence, "The Word," that is, the eternal, "was made flesh,"—time's creature,—"and dwelt among us."

We may now ask, How shall we reach the place where reality is to be found? What steps will lead us to that crossing of time and eternity? How touch the crux of the matter? An adequate answer would, of course, touch too much territory to be attempted here. We content ourselves, therefore, with a single suggestion.

Jesus gives us a good guidepost to the dwelling place of the real: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The young man who came to Jesus in quest of eternal life is a curiously modern type of person. He was economically secure, he had a position of power. But he found life in time pointless, without verve, unstable, and he said to Jesus, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" And Jesus told him to keep the commandments. Without pausing to comment overlong on the tragedy of rejection, we note, as germane to our theme, how perfectly the ten commandments fit the pattern of the Cross. They too have a vertical and a horizontal line. The first five commandments deal with the vertical line, man's relation to God. The second five touch upon man's life in time, his dealings with his fellow man; they are humanitarian in their cast, horizontal in their direction. The young ruler thought that he had kept the commandments, but his negative reaction to Christ's specific advice showed that he had failed to complete either the horizontal or the vertical line; he was not sufficiently humanitarian to sell his goods to feed the poor, and he had put the god of material possession before the Lord God. Or, to unify the two failings, he was guilty of the deepest sin of all, the love of self. Since he had not kept the commandments, he could not enter into life.

We make a brief recapitulation. Man is searching for reality, and this exists only where time and eternity intersect. If a man will keep the commandments, boldly athwart the level line of his life in time there will fall the up-and-down line of God's grace and man's reciprocal affection; and at the point of crossing he will find a reality which is significant, joy-tinged and unchanging. In its strength he will be able to endure all the fogs, storms and aridities, all the wounds and defeats of his earthly pilgrimage and warfare. In short, he has found the meaning of the Cross, to the uninitiate, foolishness, but to him the power of God.

On Magnifying the Association

The Rev. Kendig Brubaker Cully, Ph.D.
First Congregational Church, Haverhill, Massachusetts

(An address)

DOUBTLESS we are all agreed that the Committee of the Ministry of the Conference is doing a very real service in calling this colloquy on the place and work of the Association in our Congregational Christian denominational life. It is especially timely in view of the probable imminent consummation of our union with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The Basis of Union assures the continuation of the associational system wherever it is currently operative, or as may be desired. We shall in all likelihood have the Associations with us for a long time to come. It is consequently very important that we take account of ourselves in this respect and see if we can do something constructive to make the Association the meaningful part of the United Church it should become.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood if I say it is begging the question a trifle to label this colloquy "Let Us Magnify the Association." I would respectfully suggest that maybe we ought to phrase it: "How Can We Make the Association So Meaningful That through It We Can

agnify the Church of Christ?" In our odern life, where churches as well as erything else are highly organized, no it is worth magnifying unless it conibutes mightily toward a great end.

Am I wrong in saying that I believe e Association, as it is conceived and erated today in most instances, is not lfilling a particularly significant part in r Church life? I do not say that on e basis of personal observation alone, hough I have had the opportunity to e from within the workings of several our Massachusetts Associations. When talk with ministerial colleagues I find t they feel a very great dissatisfaction. e brother put it succinctly, "It's the ak sister of Congregationalism." At e same time all of us realize the value this unit in some sense. Somehow it sn't been made to tick as it should. This nobody's fault in particular—or maybe is everybody's fault.

I

Why did the Associations arise in the rst place? I suspect the Associations ose out of the feeling of loneliness hich ministers and churches had under ur system of local autonomy. Problems ose which they wanted to talk over. A rger group could support the isolated astor or church more adequately than he they could do by themselves. Certainly e know that there was no initial enusiasm for the Association as an exression of the larger Church or as an clesiastical entity. The first Associaons were ministerial bodies—no sharing the life of the Church as a whole there, rtainly. The laymen were not in them. Also many of the colonial clergy emselves were suspicious of larger oupings. You doubtless are familiar ith the words of Nathaniel Emmons some authorities say of John Wise of pswich), who pronounced: "Associationm leads to Consociationism; Consociaonism to Presbyterianism; Presbyterianm to Episcopacy; Episcopacy to Roman atholicism; and Roman Catholicism is an ultimate fact." Maybe if N. Emmons were living in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts today he would be all the more sure on his final point about the ultimate fact of Roman Catholicism! Nevertheless the Associations did develop! Maybe Christians of the flock of Christ simply cannot stay apart! Maybe the very nature of the faith draws us together! Regardless of these early fears, we have maintained the independency of the local congregation quite satisfactorily despite the development of overhead in Association, Conference and General Council all these years. It is quite possible that our very local independency itself would have caused us to be erased long since had not these larger relationships been established.

The geographical units along whose lines Associations grew up are not any longer possessed of the same significance in many cases as they once were. County lines were followed, for example. Some of our Associations are much too small—it isn't a half-day's ride any more to go from Rowley to Haverhill. Or, maybe some Associations are too large! Also, the kinds of churches which are grouped together no longer always have the affinities they once had. It is often apparent that the church people of some communities are grouped with those of towns where they seldom go. Their shopping, theatre-going, hospitalization, libraries, etc., may center in a city nearby, whereas their church relationships are quite elsewhere. Likewise, sometimes village churches still on the periphery of the metropolis are grouped with large urban or suburban churches. When problems of the churches are discussed, the feeling is likely to arise that it's difficult to meet the needs of both types of churches in a single effort.

Again, it is frequently hard to determine just what is the ecclesiastical function of the Association. You have doubtless often wondered that. We serve as a collecting agency for the per capita tax, and we have the custody of ministerial standing. Other than that, the actual business for an Asso-

ciation to do is rather vague. Resolutions can be passed, of course. The people of a local church often do not get enthusiastic over the Association because they are not aware that its action has any bearing on them. Unlike the presbytery, the Association does not have any strong governmental reason. The local church takes the Association quite casually. Suppose a delegate to an Association meeting does report to the church council, for example, what is there for the council to do about the report except to thank whoever gives it? I am willing to guess that few of you can remember specific actions which your local churches ever have taken as a direct result of some action of the Association.

The result is lack of interest in the local church. The minister does his level best to stir up some interest—nobody responds. Result—in the name of democracy the Association oftentimes becomes very undemocratic. Attendance is usually sparse. People do not go because nothing of great moment is ever done there, or so they think. If people do not go, they will not learn about denominational matters. Often those who go are simply those who got the habit years back. The leadership consequently remains stagnant. It is difficult to persuade promising leaders in the various parishes to take Association jobs because they do not know what the Association is all about. If they do take the jobs, they consider it not too flattering an honor in view of the insignificant functions they perform.

II

Thus far we have been exceedingly negative. I know the answer to these objections which you are thinking of: that beloved word fellowship. The Association does indeed continue to stand for the fellowship of the churches. It is a splendid symbol. But are we not agreed that the symbol must represent a reality if it is to be valid? We Congregationalists would be the last to encourage the use of symbols which have lost the vitality for which they are supposed to stand.

Therefore I would suggest that we rethink this matter of fellowship. How does fellowship express itself in the Association? Is it a supper each spring and fall to which the faithful ones regularly come? Is it the hearing of a treasurer's report? Is it the election of a lot of people to committees which might meet once in between Association meetings? They at least have to report at the next Association session that they have met.

Real fellowship is based on a community of action—real fellowship is a by-product of a shared experience. If fellowship is what the Association is designed to foster, then the Association must come to have more and more functional reality, or else the fellowship will be mere lip-service.

Can teeth be put into the Association's mouth? For example, does the Association ever tackle the question of a regional survey of the communities represented by the churches in its membership? Is the Association developing a Congregational strategy for its area?

Does the Association have on-going functions rather than mere periodic meetings? Do the churches within the Association cooperate on projects for constant mutual service, like the creation of a library of audio-visual aids, the cooperative purchasing and sharing of expensive equipment?

Does the Association have committees which gladly meet, and seriously, to address themselves to matters of concern to the churches and communities? Do these committees feed information to the leaders and people of the member churches? Do they activate significant projects?

Does the Association really provide a stronger witness and ministry to its area than the individual churches could perform by themselves? Does the Association have the capacity for self-evaluation? Does it study its own organizational pattern and alignments with a view to strengthening its work?

Here is a test for the Association: If

it were omitted, would the church people as a whole feel that something in their church experience was lost? And what?

Now I realize I have been sounding a negative note, and perhaps that is wrong. I hope that you will consider a few of these questions which have been raised. We believe in the Association—and we want to get rid of the feeling of the brother who said that it's the "weak sister" of Congregationalism. We don't want to have to admit that any part of our church life is a "weak sister." We want to magnify our Lord through his church. To that end let us be realistic about that part of His Church which we are here today to magnify.

Star Dust

A Legend

The Rev. Frank E. Henry
Eddyville, Iowa

"End is there none to the universe of God."
(From the title page of a book on astronomy)

In the beginning,
God in His heaven;
But darkened, the face of the deep,
Then, like fire-mist floating,
As a cloud, from beneath His throne,
An angel winged outward and downward,
Holding a torch in his hand
That all through the night rained fire.
Formless and void all lay
Like ocean waves at ebb tide.
Down the deep, abysmal dark
That fire fell soft and warm;
The falling star dust floated
Like golden foam on the ocean.
As the sun at ev'ning makes a fiery path
Of the ship's trail out on the sea,
So did the falling flame
From the torch in the angel's hand
Blaze a red path through the waste;
A burning river of light
Followed the flying form
Of the winged, heavenly one.

On through the dark and the deep;
On 'til his wings were weary;
On 'til his hands grew tired,
Holding the lamp of fire;
On 'til his eyes waxed worn—
On, and ever yet on!

At last he hovered a moment,
Then, quickly swinging, he turned,
Speeding back on that trail of fire;
Back through the dusk of dawn,
Back towards his home in heaven.
The torch was dead
But the path was red.
Thus through the void and the waste of his going,
Swiftly he followed the homeward track.

At length, through the gates of heaven,
Mantled with the mists of morning;
There at the throne of God,
Bowed the angel exhausted—
Saying, yea, singing, he said:
"End is there none to the universe of God,
End is there none to the universe of God."

The Charge to the Reverend William Thompson

On the event of his recognition at New Bedford, Feb. 23, 1949.

IT is not an easy task to give a charge to a tested, able, and conscientious minister of the gospel, yet, since he is a man, he must have some flaw which may be buttressed by words of good counsel; and since he who gives the charge is a man also, he can claim no omniscience in counsel, but can only reach into his own heart and experience, and bring forth that which has helped him, trusting that it may be of benefit to his friend in Christ.

William Thompson, you are a large man, and well equipped to display that muscular Christianity, which, we are told, appeals to masculine men. You have known the shock and tumult of football playing. Your shoulders are broad, for the bearing of burdens both spiritual and material. Yet there is one physical quality which will perhaps do more than any other to make your ministry a success; and I will tell you how to develop it. Hold out that strong right arm of yours; curl three fingers so that your index digit remains

extended. Now lean heavily on a parishioner's doorbell. Retreat until exhausted. When you have done this so many times that you have developed a callous on your forefinger, you will be a well-conditioned Christian athlete.

In a famous discourse, Richard Baxter, the great Puritan divine, charged the clergy of his day to "take heed to the flock." "But," he continued, "how can you take heed to them unless you know them?" No pastor ever really comes to know his flock by saying hello at the door Sunday mornings. Nor is the committee meeting an adequate channel of acquaintanceship. It is only in the homes of men and women that the pastor comes to know them, and to know their problems and their certainties, their fears and their faith. Now I grant that pastoral calling, though praised heaven-high (chiefly by people who do little of it) is not an unalloyed good, nor is it a sure means to a packed church. The pastor who is faithful in his calling must steel himself to much triviality; he must listen to a great deal of religious gossip, which, as William Ellery Channing once tartly observed, "is no better than any other kind of gossip." And he will often find that his hard work about the parish is taken for granted and that the pews remain disconcertingly empty.

Nevertheless, great value inheres in visitation. Even from a selfish standpoint, the preacher will gain from it, for his sermons will have the toughness and vividness that comes from first-hand contact with the raw stuff of human nature. The preacher who calls will have an awareness of the pettiness and depth of sin; he will also have a sharper vision of the bright and vaulting quality of human faith and aspiration. Further, he is shrewd who visits; for, as William A. Taylor said many years ago to a group of theological students: "The pulpit is your throne, no doubt, but then a throne is stable as it rests on the affections of the people, and to get their affections, you must visit them in their dwellings." But the visiting minister will do more than *get* professional security and homiletic help. He will *give* help and security to his people in their hours of need, be those hours gray with uncertainty or black with tragedy. He will be their minister in the truest sense of the word; and he will exemplify the Master who "went about doing good." I charge you, therefore, push doorbells.

Now you may protest with truth that oftentimes parish calling becomes an empty drudgery, a stale chore to which one holds because of a false statistical pride, an endless routine which so drains the soul of force that often a mere husk of a man pushes the doorbell. Many a pastor, impaled on the dilemma of trying to produce thoughtful sermons, and clear, far-sighted plans while galloping madly about in an effort to keep us with his calling, has found himself in sympathy with that exasperated preacher who told his congregation, "You may have my head, or my heels. You can't have both." And there is point to that position. The writer of Ecclesiasticus tells us that "The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure." He must have a measure of freedom from external, physical activity.

This holy leisure you must spend in the acquisition of wisdom. And here I have a tale to tell you. It is said that once a devout priest, himself a mystic, went to visit St. Bonaventura the "Seraphic Doctor," the great Italian theologian of the thirteenth century. And after time spent sitting in the sun, talking about the things of God, the visitor said: "I am come that I might know the secret of your spiritual wisdom. Your words are so deep, yet so lucid: so precise, yet so rich with mystical overtones, that you must have access to all the recorded wisdom of holy men since the beginning of time. And you must spend many hours with your books. I pray you, show me your library."

And Bonaventura led his guest to a cell, and opened the door. No books of parchment or dark-tooled leather met the gaze. The cell was stony and barren,

but on the wall there was a crucifix: "This, and nothing more," said Bonaventura, "this is my library."

Now I am sure that you will see beyond the accident, the form, of this symbol on the wall, to its essence. The saint was saying that the spring of wisdom is meditation on the timeless and central realities of the spirit,—that each man who would be wise must have a secret place where he meets with the Most High. No carefully integrated program, no unceasing round of pastoral visitation will make your ministry here a true success unless you have the equivalent of Bonaventura's library, a place where, undistracted, you may study the things of Christ that you may effectively deliver them to your people.

I charge you, therefore, push doorbells; yet fail not to study long in Bonaventura's library.

Our Congregational Part in This Ministry

Portions of an address by

Dr. Fred S. Buschmeyer

Associate Minister of the General Council, at the Springfield Study Conference, January 31, 1949

As penetration of vision is of primary importance to the scientist using an electro-microscope in his search for some of the most minute forms of life, so perspective of vision is a first requisite for us when we begin to think about our Congregational part in the total Christian ministry. Not that it is unimportant for us to understand ourselves right down to our deepest and most distinctively personal characteristics. On the contrary, it is of the highest importance that we should be able to see ourselves as individuals, as local churches, and as a fellowship of churches, with the most penetrating vision possible. It is likewise true that frequently we do not see ourselves with this kind of penetrating discernment. Before this hour is over I hope to be able to say some things which may offer us at least a little further vision at this particular point.

But in a Pre-Lenten Study Conference where the main theme is set by the New Testament phrase, "We Have This Ministry," I would not want to be guilty of seeming to put the cart before the horse; the secondary, before the primary; a form or medium of expression, before the essential truth, idea, or spirit, itself. When I invite you to think with me about our Congregational part in this ministry, I do so with the same kind of mind and spirit that I would have to employ were I inviting you to think about the American part of the Atlantic ocean. We have to start where we are. Our approach to the Atlantic ocean is at the point where it touches our shores. Undoubtedly something of the impact of the Atlantic ocean is conditioned by the geographical nature and fact of our shore-line. But the ocean is much larger than our shore-line; and the power of its rising and falling originates far beyond the point at which you and I may stand to look upon or touch these ever moving tides of great waters.

It is with this kind of an appreciation or perspective in my own mind that I approach consideration of our "Congregational part" in this ministry. The immediate and external forms of our everyday ministry are definitely conditioned by the fact that we are members of the

Congregational Christian fellowship and churches. But the basic truth and the essential spirit of our Christian ministry derive from vast and eternal sources that have touched the world and the centuries at many points where the name Congregational has either never been heard or is merely a name that has no immediate significance in the vital Christian experience of people who are just as grateful for the revelation of God given mankind through Jesus Christ as we are.

In order that you may have full assurance that so far as I am concerned this approach to our subject is vastly more than a merely pious gesture, let me pass on to you a brief recital of something that I have witnessed with my own eyes and felt with my own heart within the last year. For in this experience I saw and felt what had hitherto been largely a matter of theoretical conviction, arrived at through a reading of the New Testament and Church History, but never witnessed at first hand. As a matter of fact I owe a report of this experience to you as my fellow Congregational Christian ministers, for it was as one of your delegates that I attended the first meeting of the fully organized World Council of Churches, in Amsterdam; and it was here that I gained a new vision and a first-hand experience of the central fact to which the Christian Church at its best has always borne witness.

At Amsterdam there were two things which happened which were like the small but tremendously important and revealing reactions at the end of a long and involved scientific experiment. The first of these culminating experiences was the consciousness that sometimes came over you even while you listened to a man saying in a strange tongue what would have seemed theologically strange and not particularly pleasing to your ears no matter in what tongue it had been said. As that man spoke, however, you detected something of a gentle earnestness and a deep devotion in his manner; you saw a certain light of faith and unashamed adoration in his eyes that made you know, "This man has been with the same Jesus from whom I have drawn my highest dreams of what life might be like. The marks are visible on his face. The lines of character are there. And they are authentic! There is no disputing them. We may have started from different places. We may have come by different roads. Out of our differing backgrounds we may describe the theological significance of our experience in different ways. But it is the same Lord whom we have both known!"

I

That was the essential experience out of which the Amsterdam message spoke later when it said in substance, "We find ourselves divided by race, nationality, class, culture, and even by pride of theological position and ecclesiastical tradition. But Christ is not divided, and He has made us His own! In seeking Him we have found each other." And it was true! We discovered for ourselves in the midst of that specific situation that it is Christ Himself who is our uniting hope and our social redeemer, not at the level of our planning or our achievement, but at the level of His redemptive love. The running of a church, local or universal, undoubtedly involves many processes and disciplines of secondary importance. But at the heart of "This Ministry" of ours, Congregational though we may designate it, we discover that our primary responsibility, joy, and hope lies in leading men and women to know in their hearts and minds both the Jesus of history and the Christ of experience. For I have seen it demonstrated again, in our own day in history, that it is the power of God in Him which alone is able to draw men of all nations, all classes, all cultures, together in the kind of trust and freedom for creative effort which could make of our distraught humanity a genuine fellowship of the reconciled sons and daughters of God.

And the second thing of outstanding spiritual significance that happened at

Amsterdam, according to my way of thinking, was the fact that many of us came to a new and vivid consciousness of a Divine Purpose working above all our little differences; actually ready to bless and confirm our high and holy intent when in humility and determination we said, as actually we did say, "Confronting all our differences and misunderstandings, we are still determined to stay together! Much as we honor our own particular traditions, we have become conscious of a Universal Divine Love, revealed in Jesus, and felt here, that will not let us go our completely separate ways any longer." In the moments in which this spirit gripped our hearts and minds we saw how truly historic Christianity has stressed the fact that it is Divine Grace, the gift of the love of God revealed in Jesus, and not any system, institution, or formula of our own creation that offers us our highest and our final hope of both individual and social salvation. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." And it is at God's initiative, and not by reason of our own ingenuity or cleverness, that the hope of a kingdom of righteousness above all the kingdoms of this earth arises in our hearts and minds to haunt us with the consciousness of our incompleteness until we find our completion and our universal brotherhood in serving Him.

The Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches issued many pages of reports and findings. These findings can be of great stimulation and help to all who study them with reverent minds. To my mind, the supreme achievement of Amsterdam was something that had to be written on the tablets of the human heart. And I rejoice that it was my privilege, as one of your delegates, to rediscover, in a flesh-and-blood present-day setting, the central truths of a Gospel Ministry that is vastly larger than the colloquialisms of any land or any denomination. God was and is in Jesus reconciling the world unto Himself! And we have the high honor and the terrible responsibility of serving as His ministers! It is in the light of this experience that I think of our Congregational part in This Ministry!

II

If time permitted and I had the knowledge and the ability, I would like to be able to trace for you at least the outlines of the circumstances and the personalities in and through which our Congregational part of This Ministry has been most creative and most faithful to the central truths of the essential Christian Gospel of good news. Since I do want to move on as quickly as possible, however, to a consideration of some of the particular problems and opportunities of our present-day American Congregational ministry, let me summarize a spiritual review of our denominational history with just a couple of brief observations.

Let me confess that I am amazed at the frequency and superficiality with which I hear Congregationalism identified with the beginnings of American democracy and with a particular form of local church government, as if the form and the source were one and the same thing. My amazement does not spring from the fact that I do not believe that there is a perfectly legitimate connection between essential Congregationalism and these further facts or forms. My amazement springs from the fact that apparently we forget so easily, first, that Congregationalism was an experienced fact in Britain before it was known in America, and second, that our American Congregational and democratic forms sprang from a particular, and to my mind indispensable, spiritual conviction and discipline.

It was this spiritual conviction that gave rise to our form of church government as a secondary expression of the primary concern, whether in England or in America. That primary concern and conviction was that a true church is composed of men and women who stand ready to testify, and then to be governed by the fact that they have had an experience of God in their hearts, through Jesus. That

constituted the essential foundation of our earliest Congregational Churches. It was the reality of this experience that led our English Congregational forefathers to proclaim that there was only one head of the Church, namely, Jesus Christ. It was the power of this experience of God in their own lives that gave our forefathers courage to establish "gathered" churches, without any external or visible form of authority. It was not that they wished to be free from any sense of authority, or free from any necessity of discipline. The distinction between their church and other churches lay in the reality of their acceptance of a personally experienced Divine authority rather than merely man-made authority.

I am afraid that much of our present-day pride in our "Congregational freedom" represents a far cry from the kind of authority and the kind of concern for spiritually disciplined freedom that moved in the hearts and minds of those men and women who first gave expression to our Congregational part of "This Ministry!"

I would venture further that the most creative moments in our denominational history have been those moments in which our ministers and our people have been concerned, primarily, not to protect some form of organizational freedom, but to extend the authority of Almighty God, as revealed in Jesus, as a force to be recognized and made supreme in every relationship of life.

We do not have a denominational record of unbroken uniformity in either our theological thinking or in our local church government. Our original Congregational part in the total Christian ministry has been most truly expressed and most strongly revivified in those moments when we have called men and women, in the midst of varying times and circumstances, to heed the living authority of Almighty God rather than the prevailing customs of the time, the entrenched position of some ecclesiastical creed or organization, or the more materialistic motives of short-sighted or power-minded men.

I once heard the brilliant Washington representative of the *London Times,* Sir Wilmot Lewis, say that American Democracy has always been at its greatest and best when it has been engaged in some great moral protest. I believe his insight was correct. And I believe that his insight and judgment can also be applied to the essential Congregational part of the Christian ministry in both England and America. It is not in the nature of essential Congregationalism to be afraid of authority, as such. It is in the nature of essential Congregationalism to call men and women to put the authority of Almighty God as revealed in Jesus, first! And to be willing to walk in fellowship with all who will follow where God's Holy Spirit leads!

If we would be concerned to preserve essential Congregationalism in our day, let this be the focus of our Gospel and of our labors!

III

Now, as a free fellowship of ministers and people who have had this kind of a spiritual heritage bequeathed to us, what about the state of health, efficiency, and creative power of our present-day American Congregational part in the total Christian ministry? This is the time and the place for us to look at ourselves with the unprejudiced and penetrating discernment of the scientist. For we believe in the Incarnation, the Word made flesh. How clearly and effectively is that Word being expressed in the flesh of our working fellowship? For though we believe thoroughly in putting the Spirit first, I doubt very much if any of us has ever seen a disembodied spirit. And even in our spiritually free fellowship, where all our organizational relationships are on a voluntary basis, it does still remain necessary to maintain some kind of an effective local church and denominational "body" with enough rigidity of organizational skeleton to keep it upright, and with enough veins and arteries of personal interest and con-

tinuing cooperation to keep the blood of a healthy and vigorous faith coursing throughout the fellowship.

As a part of your Pre-Lenten study and spiritual discipline, I would heartily encourage each of you to take a long and serious look at the local Congregational church as you know it, to see how well it is fulfilling its Christian ministry in the community, in the light of Christ's Gospel, in the light of the best of our denominational heritage, and in the light of the dominant problems and opportunities of our age. If you have any time left after this bit of spiritual research, you might do the same with our Associations, our Conferences, and our General Council.

It should be perfectly obvious that for a free and voluntary denominational fellowship of churches to maintain a continuing high and effective type of ministry, more sustained individual intelligence, concern, and cooperation will be necessary than in a more centralized and authoritarian form of interchurch relationship. This is one of the most seriously important paradoxes of our freedom. To keep our free fellowship effective we must voluntarily put more thought, effort, and consecration into matters of standards and cooperation than do the ministers of more highly organized denominations. It is my own deep conviction, however, that such voluntary service in the name of fellowship, if intelligently and enthusiastically given, will produce more desirable results throughout the life of our churches than any more mechanical or authoritarian system could possibly produce. But intelligent and continuing cooperation on the part of all of us is of the absolute essence!

You and I are living in a day when the temptation has been growing stronger and stronger either to assume an attitude of atomistic individualism, or to put more and more trust in mechanical or percentage-wise programs for the strengthening of our fellowship. This has meant that in many instances the State Superintendent, who was once the leader and shepherd and encourager of a fellowship, often has reluctantly had to become more and more of a "needler," and more and more a promotional agent of new percentages. The most effective corrective to this eventually self-destructive trend that I know anything about is a greater sense of intelligent cooperative concern to demonstrate both the spiritual and the financial values of an effective voluntary fellowship.

Neither I as an executive officer, nor the members of the Commission on the Ministry, have the slightest idea that we can do what needs to be done by ourselves. We shall do our best to chart directions and furnish the initial, and at least our part of the continuing, leadership. But the final effectiveness will be achieved only through your sharing both with creative suggestions and in the actual extension of a more intelligent, cooperative spirit of fellowship throughout the whole range of our denominational life.

Thus far we see two principal points at which to start. First, by becoming personally acquainted with every man now in seminary in training for our Congregational Christian ministry, and by sharing with these men the fullest possible understanding of the aims, methods, and spirit of our fellowship before they take their first parishes. Second, by calling together the present Ministerial Standing Committees of our Associations and Conferences to give serious and detailed consideration to every ministerial need within these areas, and to every ministerial opportunity for demonstrating the potential effectiveness of our voluntary, cooperative fellowship.

It will undoubtedly take the rest of this present year to make even a thorough exploratory beginning of these two aspects of our work. In the meantime there are a multitude of less dramatic but essential aspects of our ministerial fellowship to be cared for such as: the future of the MINISTER'S QUARTERLY, the relationship of the Associates in Reading to

the Department of the Ministry, better methods of recruiting for the ministry, the completion of our Ministerial Registry, and a continuing contact with our men serving in the Army and Navy chaplaincy.

But at the present moment I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to lay upon your hearts this consideration of our Congregational part in the Ministry that has been given to us by the One supreme Head of the Christian Church throughout the world, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Can We Still Be Evangelical?

The Editor

THE morning was wind-blown and the windows of his office study were rain-drenched, which may have colored his mood. But he was not inclined to take a bright view of contemporaneous preaching. He was in a position to speak thereof with authority since it was his vocation, amongst other very important things, to know and evaluate it. Present-day preaching, he thought, lacked definite direction and fervor and it was no longer evangelistic. He stressed, also, the gap between the forms theology is now taking and the inherited offices of preaching. All this the editor confesses is an inadequate paraphrase of his incisive way of saying these things, but it is not misrepresentative and "evangelistic" is literally quoted.

That is a word spacious enough to cover the entire mandate of preaching and important enough to enlist the best efforts of the dictionary. There are in Webster's Collegiate nine variants stemming from the parent noun "evangel." Evangel has a lot of linguistic relatives near or remote —a column of them beginning with "eu." There are such as Eupnea, which most people have without knowing it so long as their respiration is normal, and Eulogia which is the bread blessed but not consecrated and distributed to the congregation at the end of Mass. In all likelihood a vestige of the apostolic love feast, but a word which might equally be applied to the family loaf over which grace has been said. And there is Eupepsia which should accompany it since good digestion should wait on appetite. And Euthenics the science of human betterment for which so much more than bread is needed. So many of these "eu" words have a good spirit and an upward look. One wonders how the Greeks could have made two letters so significant.

Evangel is related also to "angel" for which heavenly messenger a dictionary supplies various definitions, one or two of which show how far a word may wander from its original meaning—like fallen angels. Words are really quite hopeless vagrants.

Evangel was, at any rate, a word New Testament Christianity needed and took and used because New Testament Christianity believed itself to be good news and the messenger of good news. The New Testament takes many old Greek words and charges them with momentous meanings. St. Paul may have been the first to suit "evangelist" to Christian uses. He did that for many words current in his time, and thereafter they were, so to speak, reborn. "Evangelist" seems to have taken on a definite connotation as soon as divisions of office and labor came to be recognized in the Apostolic Church. Ephesians notes "Apostles," "Prophets," "Evangelists," and "some to shepherd and teach"; all this to equip the saints for the business of the ministry for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. These

divisions of office, labor and endowment were gradually lost or, perhaps more accurately, absorbed, in the gradations of ecclesiastical status, orders, and authority in the Latin church.

There must be somewhere some scholarly tracing of the sequences, uses and meanings of "evangelist" and "evangelistic" in the history of the Western Church, but this editor has not at hand the needed reference books. Their spirit can never have been lost, else the church would have been lost and few of its causes furthered. But the vast mechanism of Latin Catholicism carried the individual with it, its discipline shaped him and he needed only to obey to be saved.

* * *

Some of the Reformed Churches continued this discipline though much modified, but it is reasonably right to say that evangelism, in its now inherited meanings, reappeared with the "gathered" churches who, leaving established orders, believed themselves to be restoring the Apostolic way, and once the word came into circulation it acquired many overtones and carried with it a wealth of association. The Wesleyan movement kindled a new fervor in Anglicanism which in time left its imprint upon the evangelical wing of the Established Church. Jonathan Edwards's "Great Awakening" and Whitefield's eloquence and passion gave changed form and direction to colonial religion in America. Evangelism inherited a theology which supplied it a basis for its appeal, and theology itself was reshaped by evangelistic fervor. The history of New England theology from Jonathan Edwards to Edward Park confirms this and there is no need here to precise that theology. It began with man's lost estate. It set forth the scheme of redemption and it offered those who accepted it or rejected it the momentous issue of eternity. Thus evangelism and evangelistic became so many things and yet always with a supporting unity. Its power was in the tremendous appeal of it; the acceptance of that appeal was inner peace, a changed life, a place in the communion of the saints and citizenship in a land of pure delight.

All these were great chords to play upon and those whose gift it was to play upon them became in a very specific way evangelists. Their names are now beyond computing. The greatest of them are part of the inheritance of English speaking Protestantism, and the Catholic missioner is an evangelist specially trained and set apart with another name. One hundred years ago there was Finney with his almost hypnotic power. Seventy-five years ago D. L. Moody, massive in his wisdom, zeal and tenderness. And there was Billy Sunday and his sawdust trail. And so on and on.

In general the evangelical churches recruited their membership with some form of evangelical appeal, which was why they came to be called evangelical. They believed the unregenerate must be converted to be saved; that conversion was an experience which could and should be confessed—the mystic and transforming office of the Holy Spirit. The Methodist Church converted. The Presbyterian Church stressed the Westminster Confession. The Baptist made immersion a symbol of death and burial to the old life and resurrection to the regenerate life.

Congregationalists made their courses more or less optional. Liberals held that they were pretty good to begin with but still capable of improvement.

But, to repeat, there were constants; "evangelical" and theological "orthodoxy" were synonymous in the Congregational fold. The Massachusetts Court would now probably hold that a Trust Fund for the support of evangelical preaching (and the editor knows of exactly such a Trust Fund) means that the minister must be a Congregationalist as opposed to a possible Unitarian candidate for the pulpit so supported. Evangelistic still carries rather definite connotations though they are now much befogged. Quite like most other inherited covering terms, such as "Democracy" and "Americanism" and "Na-

tionalism" and the Republican Party and any party platform. These loose and spacious labels are, one supposes, indispensable but they do make us any amount of trouble.

* * *

In re: "Evangelical" and "Evangelistic" one can at least begin by going back to the dictionary, the New Testament and the state of our souls and society, since for our souls and society the Gospel is still good news. It is good news that God loved and still loves the world. It's always been a pretty hard world to love, this human world of ours, ever since history began. Only a divine patience would have given it up long ago. Astronomically the physical world with its living passengers is an inconsequential speck in an immeasurable void. But in the moral order it has meanings and controls and a destiny still unrealized. It is not a derelict at the mercy of impersonal cosmic winds and tides. There are charts and a Supreme Command. Evangelistic preaching will not say all this in terms so cold. It will make the confidence in God's concern for us warm, assuring and undergirding.

It is good news that sin can be forgiven and faults corrected and atoned for and that life is not a dead-end street. The saving power of repentance is good news though searching. The editor remembers the mourners' bench, improvised from winter to winter, in a little village church of his boyhood, up to which schoolmates and the village drunkard went to kneel side-by-side while quavering voices sang "Just as I am Without One Plea." There were age-old wisdoms behind the mourner's bench and equally age-old misunderstandings and mishandlings of youth. But for all that the mourners' bench stood for something enduringly needed and never more than now when, if all who needed to go to it went up together, it would go half around the world. Evangelistic preaching will forget neither the "Mourners Bench" nor the "Mercy Seat."

It is good news that redemptive love shares and saves; that the Cross has a power to soften hard hearts and pierce iron curtains. It is still good news that there is a scheme of redemption though its patterns have become blurred and we struggle to rephrase what after all is so essentially simple. It is good news that there is Divine Order for us to seek and that we have help in seeking it and that it might some time be realized in our own undivinely disordered world.

The Sermon on the Mount is still good news and great news. There is nothing like it in the newspapers, which specialize mostly in bad news, aided and abetted by radio commentators who play their remunerative music upon chords of suspicion, fear, prejudice and the delusions of atomic power as an international safeguard. They announce that there is not a cough in a carload and the possibility of a third world war in two years in exactly the same chatty way. Somehow they seem to lack a sense of proportion.

* * *

Evangelistic preaching was and may continue to be creative. It had and may have a sense of direction. It had and may have passion in it at its best and a power of appeal. It searched but it enheartened. It was a live coal from the altar which might in high moments touch a preacher's lips. It has now been muted amongst us for many reasons. Very likely the disintegration, not too strong a word, of its inherited theological support is the main reason—the gap noted in the first paragraph. The man who stressed that gap was in a position to know. He was thinking aloud from his tower room in a great theological seminary. These inherited theologies were compact, coherent and preachable. Theology in many quarters is no longer compact nor coherent and in its more speculative regions it is not preachable.

This editor does not maintain that theology must be made, at any cost to its intellectual integrity, a convenient pattern for a preacher. On the contrary. But if it cannot in some fashion and on some

level be preached with convincing and creative power something is wrong with it somewhere. It is not easy to reduce a good deal of contemporaneous theological nebulae to shining, singing, homeletic orders, amongst other things, because of its extremely sophisticated vocabulary which most lay people cannot possibly understand.

Perhaps Dr. Scherer meant that preaching must be purposive, ardent to seek and to save, a mediation of the good news of Christianity to a time so desperately needing good news, and all that for faith and hope and courage. Such preaching does not need to label itself nor lean backward to escape an outdated past nor lose itself in the clouds after the still unordered, but it would be evangelistic.

* * *

For a long time now the editor has finished his editorial for the May issue of the MINISTER'S QUARTERLY with some writing about the magic of May. He had then only to leave his ink-stained table with a patina of many migrations across the years, and go out and watch a border of yellow crocus or see if the tulips were in bud, or plant the second planting of peas, or listen if the catbird had come back to the lilacs, or look to see if the robins were nesting in the wisteria again or there was a flash of an oriole's flight in the pendent branches of old elms. And now? May is caught between the walls of high apartment houses or decorously patterned in well-kept lawns, or more or less scattered along the rights of way of the Long Island Railroad. But it is still May—the luminous, blossoming beauty of the great constancies of earth and sky. May, too, is an evangel. It is always good news.

Our Sureness Is Only in God

Elizabeth S. Beckwith

WHEN the marks, both physical and spiritual, of a bad accident are still upon one, may not be the time to attempt to put some considerations into words. At such a moment, we hesitate to seem to dramatize a personal event. We do not like it to appear that all is grist that comes to our mill, even pain. We do not want to be thought to be too subjective or introspective in the evaluating of our own experience. Yet at times it is right to attempt to articulate clear convictions that possibly just pertain to a few and yet on the other hand may be giving voice to the secret hungers and unfilled needs of those who cannot speak.

I am quite sure, in the light of this recent experience, that those of us who customarily are in good and comfortable and unthinking health minimize to a degree the actuality of intense physical pain and what it does to a person. Just as it is quite easy for most of us to be philosophical about other people's problems, so is it easy for us to be uncognizant of their suffering and completely unimaginative as to what that suffering can, and in most cases does, do to their bodies, their minds, and their spirits.

One realizes, of course, that there are gradations of sensitivity and also differing levels of maturity in the meeting of difficult experiences, and the resultant power to lay hold on that which alone is of any comfort in desperate hours. At present, as in the past weeks, it is almost a matter of humiliation to me that I who ordinarily have a strong and constant and happy spiritual life, have been so dependent upon the mediation of the sense of God to me through the love and prayers of others. All through the years I have been forced from time to time to realize how average I am and how typical of many. Though I do not doubt but that part of the needed lesson of this recent accident is meant to be that of humility—and that of a deeper sort than I can express—a feeling is also emerging that possibly I can put into words a few things about which there generally is silence.

If, then, these times of spiritual dependence do come in many average lives, they bear thinking about. Although at present I find it hard (for it seems too undisciplined and too easy) to say to myself, I am sure I would say to another, "Relax in just the knowledge of the love of God—let yourself simply rest in the very fact that in His great goodness, His tender and loving mercy, He can come close to you and be made real through those of us who love Him and love you." Little as many of us may like to admit it, I am sure that there come times when God's grace must needs be mediated to us through another. Therefore, since He has made us so, it can be no cause for too great a shame. The very fact of the interdependence of His children should quicken to the level of acute knowledge their sense of relationship in Him. Buoyant and loving and alive is such a relationship, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To the one who seeks to minister the question now turns. And it should not be a time of self-questioning—of conscious thinking as to "what is the best approach." This matter of ministering to another child in the family of God, for the moment sorely oppressed, is a thing of insight, of delicate perceptiveness, of a quick and selfless loving. It is a brief period in the timeless void of the pain of another when the fruitions of one person's hours of faith and prayer are garnered and their richness shared. The light touch of the Spirit is in all this, guiding, prompting

with gentleness, blessing with quiet peace. Prayer issues forth like a flower on the stalk of faith. There is nothing self-conscious or premeditated about it. Just as surely, there is no substitute for it. As the words fall from the lips of another, as strength is communicated, inner integration begins to take place and a sense of insufferable need is met.

I cannot see why all of us, particularly all ministers, are not more direct and more prayerful. Some, of course, rush in where angels fear to tread, and I am afraid that I, more than most, would rule these out. It is because of this group that many give less than should be given, less than they have within themselves to give. The very ministers who are afraid of being insensitive to the reticences, or intrusive of the privacy, of another, are probably the ones who would not be. Though the following may sound highly paradoxical, I think it should not be easy at all to pray with or for another. Yet at the same time I think no one should be allowed to visit one in great pain who has not such a real and selfless love actuating in his heart that incessant prayer is being made all the time to God, prayer so real and overflowing that it rises from heart to lips and is used as a means of grace to assuage the other's suffering of body and of spirit.

Not too much can be said except in a general way about the one who is the sufferer. Three things, however, I would like simply to suggest. First, that it is God and not His gifts that is important, even though His gifts may be the greatly desired ones of a conscious feeling of His presence and His help. The stern reality of trust without sight, of faith in the actuality of God without the warmth of any emotional response in our own hearts, is an exceedingly hard lesson to learn. In his sermon, "The Hero in Thy Soul," delivered soon after the sudden death of his wife, Dr. Gossip has this to say: "To me the essence of faith has always seemed a certain intrepidity of loyalty that can believe undauntedly in the dark, and that still trusts God unshaken even when the evidence looks fairly damning." I am sure that the chastening spirit of our Lord and God is still abroad this day, for we are as wayward as were His children of the psalmist's age or any other. We in no way deserve any of His gifts, but sometimes we are presuming enough to think we can earn, or have earned, a few of them. This is not true, and if we need be taught in a hard and difficult way what is the truth, we will nevertheless, and quite surprisingly, find that in just the immutable fact that God *is,* that in sickness and in sorrow, as in joy, we are still under the shadow of His hand, there is sweetness and a sure confidence in that knowledge.

Secondly, and as an encouragement to the surprising number who practice intercessory prayer, I would like to say that I am sure there is no way in which we can give more to our friends. When one is too ill, or too stricken, or too bewildered to pray for one's self, it is of infinite comfort just to rest back and rest *in* the love and the prayers of others. There is nothing weak or sentimental about this need, and sometimes there is for this strong, imaginative, tender and upholding prayer an urgent necessity. Paul thought it no shame to ask for the prayers of those he trusted and loved, and neither should we. In our turn we will pray for others with all the more poignancy of understanding and of desire.

In the third place, it is surprising how meaningful the words of Paul about bearing branded upon one's body the marks of Christ can become. We do not need to make too literal an interpretation of this statement and can allow ourselves some latitude in its application. Any hard experience is bound to leave its outward marks. Perhaps, most probably in fact, they are not marks incurred in defense of the gospel as such and therefore cannot be truly said to be "the marks of the Lord Jesus." Yet it is the inner imprint upon our spirits that is significant. If these outer scars, these deeper lines that the accidents and sorrows of life bring

to us, can be symbolic of a spiritual deepening within, then we can rejoice in almost anything that befalls us.

Most of us are not wise enough or brave enough to ask God to teach us the lessons we need to know. We can pray, however, in moments of health and strength, that when the lessons come we may learn them. We can pray, too, that our faith in God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, fail not; that we may realize the sacramental element there can be in all human experience; and that we may render back to Him a continual sacrifice of praise and prayer. His mercy to us is unending and all our life ahead can have given to it a strength that is certain. Radiance can illumine our days. Inner composure is often a result of outer struggle. Above all, vicarious understanding of others, and therefore a more loving spirit toward them, comes truly to us when our own hearts have been made quick and sensitive through suffering, and when our sureness is only in God. As a final gift, beyond all our deserving, is the quiet peace that issues forth from gratitude. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

Free Copy of Minutes

If anyone present at the Special Meeting of the General Council, February 4 and 5, 1949 at Cleveland wishes to have a copy of the Minutes or a copy of "Questions and Answers concerning the Merger," issued April 27, 1949, will he write to the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, Room 915, 287 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y., and he will be sent free copies of each.

FRED S. BUSCHMEYER, *Scribe.*

Pastoral Prayer for Children's Day

The Rev. Milton F. Schadegg
Arlington, Mass.

EVER-LOVING and forgiving Father, God of parents and of children, we come to thee with thankful hearts that thou didst urge the poet to speak of the beauties of a happy family life. We thank thee that in the quiet times we, thy children, may know the desire to be forgiven and to be in tune with thee. We bless thee that thou wilt reclothe us in rightful minds, that even when the seats of the mighty are shaken we can find the strength of pure lives and deeper reverence in serving thee.

We thank thee for the Children's Day tradition in our land. We bless thee for the pattern of parenthood and its ideals which are at the basis of all love.

For the devotion and care which our parents have so sincerely bestowed upon us, we give thee praise; as we bless them too.

For the silent heroism of homefolk and the happy hours of childhood we give thee thanks. For the language of love which expresses itself in unceasing care we praise thee. May the providence of a hardworking father and the creativeness of a faithful mother, and the pure and complete trust of a little child, be our beacons as we travel life's pathways. May the joys of loyalty to the ideals of the Christian family become ever richer in our daily lives.

Lord God of the young and the old, may the laughter within our own homes make us sensitive to the silence in homes that have no opportunity for mirth.

Help us, Father, to see today something we have never seen before, and to do today something for Thee, which we have never done before. Reveal to us our prejudices and our faulty thinking. Show us our foolish pretensions. May we strive with thy help to be more gently and trusting—more worthy of our family, our friends, and of thee.

Keep us from lip-service and the easy explanations and excuses. Give us a lively sense of interest in each other; and temper us in qualities of generosity, judgment, and restraint that we may be as trustees of each other—as one family helping each to do right, as we all try to walk in Thy ways.

Hear now, our Father, the quiet prayers of the faithful. Speak to us according to our several needs, as in trusting silence we continue in the abundant way of prayer.

Silent Meditation.

Response.